

Gabriella Mazzon 2004: *A History of English Negation*. London: Pearson-Longman. 176 pp.

Ignacio M. Palacios Martínez
Universidad de Santiago de Compostela
iafeans@usc.es

It would be difficult to deny the existence of recurrent topics and research areas in English linguistics and, even more, in the general linguistic panorama. They are generally fields of study that stand out for their complexity and universality. They normally show relevant implications for the entire grammatical system and they tend to be susceptible of analysis from multiple perspectives and approaches. Without doubt, one of these major linguistic areas is negation. Several scholars (Jespersen 1917; Poldauf 1964; Horn 1989; Tottie 1991, Bernini, and Ramat 1992; Progovac 1994; Wouden 1997) to mention just a few, have already referred to the linguistic and extralinguistic reasons and factors that justify the study of negative polarity as it is connected not only with Linguistics but with a wide range of disciplines, such as Philosophy, Logic, Psychology and Mathematics. Horn (1989: XIII) refers to this question very graphically, affirming that the study of negation “has produced some of the most important linguistic discoveries (and arguably some of the most important linguistic errors) of thinkers as diverse as Aristotle, Russell, Frege, Bergson, Jespersen, Wittgenstein, Strawson, and Searle.” Seifert and Welte (1987), in their thorough bibliography of negation, already listed over three thousand references, mostly bearing on negation in English, and this number has certainly been increased in the last two decades with many contributions dealing with the syntactic and socio-pragmatics of English negation at both the micro and macro levels of language. In spite of this, all grammarians interested in negative polarity are fully aware that there are still unresolved issues to be explored, such as the pragmatics of negation in both speech and writing, the contrast between *no* and *not* negation (as in *they didn't see anybody* vs. *they saw nobody*), the opposition between affixal and non affixal negation (as in *He is not happy* vs. *he is unhappy*), the nature and syntactic features of negative polarity items (NPI's), negative raising, negative transfer or *not*-transportation (as in *Peter does not think Paul is coming to the party*), problems related to the scope of negation with quantifiers (*All the boys did not come* is either paraphrased “Not all the boys came—but some did” or “None of the boys came”), negation and idiomaticity (as in *Dont't put the cart before the horse; no gain without pain*), the acquisition of negation in both native and second/foreign language, double and multiple negation (as in *I didn't do nothing no more; It is not an insignificant issue*), the features of negation associated with a particular genre and register, and so this list could go on and on.

I have to admit that when I was informed of the publication of Mazzon's contribution to the field, which forms part of the prestigious Longman Linguistics Library series whose general editors are Geoffrey Horrocks (Cambridge University) and David Denison (University of Manchester), and I had the opportunity to look at the table of contents, I certainly thought that this work had definitely come to fill in an important gap in the English negation literature. At first sight, it was apparently very comprehensive and was focused on the most central issues in English negation. A close critical reading of this volume partly confirmed my expectations but also revealed some weaknesses which still demand further research on most of the questions mentioned above.

In what ways is Mazzon's monograph different from previous general studies on negation? Firstly, Gabriella Mazzon, Associate Professor of English at the University of Naples (Italy), presents an extensive study of negation that combines both synchronic and diachronic complementary analyses. In this respect, this was something urgently required since most of the previous works had either concentrated on this area from a diachronic perspective (Jespersen 1917; Tiekens-Boon van Ostade, Tottie, and van der Wurff 1999) or from a synchronic one (Klima 1964; Givón 1978; Horn 1989; Tottie 1991; Progovac 1994; Haegeman 1995; Wouden 1997; Horn and Kato 2000).

Mazzon's handbook is organised in six chapters with two appendices and a subject index. The inclusion of an author index would also have been desirable in order to trace particular sources or theories. Chapter 1 is merely introductory, tackling general and typological questions: the nature and status of negation versus affirmation, the distinction between sentence and constituent negation, the antagonism between ordinary negation and the so-called metalinguistic negation, and a description and explanation of the negative cycle and negative concord rule. The derivation of negation from affirmation is presented as something obvious and completely evident: "a negative sentence seems to presuppose an affirmative one, while an affirmative sentence does not carry a negative presupposition" (1). This categorical statement, however, would call for reformulation and clarification since at times it may be necessary to distinguish between an implicit from an explicit negative. An implicit negative does not always require a previous affirmation. Furthermore, for the author it is not easy to come to final conclusions on the behaviour of negation from a typological view. As regards the development of negation, she categorically claims that, contrary to what it is often done, it is not so easy to identify standard stages in the history of English with definite patterns in its negation system. This claim is quite original as this is not what is found in general manuals on the history of English.

Chapter 2 considers negation in Old English and Early Middle English, with special emphasis on the issue of variation and diversity of Old English negative forms and some specific phenomena and rules of Old English negation, such as negative concord, negative attraction, negative raising, negative conjunction and disjunction, and expletive negation and other rhetorical devices. Chapter 3 is concerned with the Middle Ages and Early Modern English periods with particular attention to the loss of negative concord from the standard, negative attraction, negative raising, negative coordination, constituent and affixal negation, and a stimulating section on dialectal and diachronic negative variation according to different text types. Chapters 4 and 5, for their part, concentrate on different characteristic features of present-day English negation while the final one, chapter 6, presents further methodological considerations and summarises the principal conclusions.

What I find most useful and innovative in all this are those links often made between modern English features and similar ones in other stages of the history of the English language. This ability of the author to resort to historical principles to explain modern English phenomena needs to be highlighted and no doubt shows the writer's learned background and academic education. A good example of this could be her discussion of the nature and acceptability of the phenomenon of multiple negation. After alluding to different elements that may account for the stigmatization of this negative type, she shows that multiple negation in written English seems to grow less and less frequent than the time when it was censured by prescriptivist grammarians (Lowth, Campbell, Clarke, and

Greenwood) and that very few occurrences appear in the eighteenth century. From this she concludes that “the statement that is often found to the effect that multiple negation was excluded from the standard as a consequence of the grammarians’ attacks is not correct, since the phenomenon had been on its way out of this variety for some time already” (92).

Secondly, this book does not concentrate only on syntactic features of negation like the placement of negation, negation with indefinites, quantifiers and comparatives, and inversion in some negative contexts (sections 4.2, 4.3 and 4.6, respectively), but also focuses on typological issues (chapter 1), and on morphological and pragmatic aspects (sections 4.8 and 4.9). Furthermore, chapter 5 concentrates on negative types outside the standard variety of English. Attention is paid to negative forms in different British dialects (Cockney, northern versus southern), Celtic varieties (Irish English, Scottish English, Welsh English, and Hyberno-English), African American English, and pidgins and creoles. This part of this book is particularly interesting as we are informed about very curious idiosyncratic and dialectal facts regarding negation, which are nonetheless not very commonly treated in other general studies on negation. In many British English dialects, the form *ain’t*, for example, is found to be more frequent in tag questions and in the speech of boys, rather than that of girls; moreover, in these varieties there is also a tendency for the generalization of the form *don’t* for all verbal persons. We also learn that in general Scottish English, multiple negation seems to be excluded from the system; however, in the Glasgow dialect, multiple negation is quite common. It is also interesting to see that in South African English there is a clause-initial semantically empty *no*, whereas in New Zealand English a clear preference for uncontracted *not* in all contexts is observed. The concluding chapter shows the regularities in the development of negation by contrasting the evolution of negation in first and second language acquisition. Although there is a serious attempt to review the differences of the development of negatives in these two contexts, this is not successfully achieved. From the writer’s account, one gets the impression that no major differences can be clearly distinguished when this is not really the case. This last section leads Professor Mazzon to treat negation, language universals and language change by searching for similarities and differences between the development of negation in children and the changes undergone by English negation in the course of history.

Thirdly, this work presents the state of the art on most relevant questions on negation by reviewing the literature conducted to date in a very systematic way. The final list of references meets the criteria of completeness and good selection. Without doubt, a lot of information is clearly condensed in few pages.

The writer’s honesty in her analysis and exposition of facts should also be highlighted. Mention is always made to the source documents and credit is always given to the real authors when ideas which are not her own are explained or examined. A good example is the writer’s reference to the distinction between language change and grammar change (141–45). She explicitly and openly mentions that for that issue she relies heavily on other scholars (Fischer, Van Kemenade, Koopman, and Van der Wurff 2000: 1–36; and Pintzuk, Tsoulas, and Warner 2000).

In contrast with the previous strengths of this monograph, what could be adduced as the most outstanding weaknesses? As mentioned above, the book is quite comprehensive and just because it intends to be so comprehensive, it becomes superficial at times. For example, affixal negation in modern English is discussed in section 4.8. but no mention

is made to the implications and contrast between affixal and non affixal negation, a question which has been discussed by other scholars at great length (Zimmer 1964; Marchand 1969; Tottie 1991), but still requires further analysis. What are, for example, the factors that favour the use of affixal negation vs. non-affixal negation? Mazzon in this case simply opts to refer the reader to the main characteristics of the negative affixes (suffix *-less* and prefixes *a-*, *in-*, *un-* and *non-*), excluding pejorative (e.g. *mal-*, *mis-*) and reversative (*de-*, *dis-*, *un-*) prefixes from her analysis. Something similar could be said of the cliticization of *not*. The writer categorically maintains that the latter is becoming more and more common but does not go deeper into the variables that facilitate auxiliary negation versus negation with *not*, that is, for example, structures of the type *We're not ready* vs. *We aren't ready*.

Although, as explained above, there is a good literature review, this should have been more critical. The author should have made her position clear on some of the controversial points discussed. It is also surprising that so little attention is paid to negation in speech and writing. In fact, Tottie's (1991) findings are merely summarised; to simply quote Tottie's interesting proposal on this issue is not really sufficient in a piece of research edited fifteen years later. One would have expected more original and personal contributions on this subject by presenting empirical evidence. The same could be said of the pragmatics of negation, which is just resolved in passing by re-examining Bolinger's (1977) contribution. Furthermore, when analysing NPI's, negative collocations, negative polarity idioms and negative expressions with existential sentences are almost completely disregarded. Indirect allusion is made to some of these when dealing with negative intensification (section 4.7.3), an area that would also demand more extensive treatment.

I also find a deficiency in the research methodology adopted. Whereas for chapters 2 and 3, that is, those sections of the book concerned with negation from a historical perspective, data and examples carefully selected by the author from original printed and electronic sources are provided to introduce and demonstrate the points discussed; in the case of chapters 4 and 5, however, Professor Mazzon simply reproduces examples already analysed in the literature dealing with negation. It is difficult to understand why no mention has been made to classic corpora-based surveys, such as Biber (1988) and, more particularly, Biber, Johansson, Leech, Finnegan, and Conrad (1999). The further elaboration of the discussion of findings offered by the latter to explain the high frequency of negative forms in speech should have a relevant place in this publication.

The important contrast between the historical and the modern parts is also perceived in the external format adopted. While the first three chapters include ten tables and one figure to illustrate and support the arguments made, none of them are presented in the rest of the book. In possible future editions of this work it would be necessary to achieve a balance between the historical and the present-day English sections, and it would be even more essential to provide clear data representing current English use of negation. A few years ago, this could be quite problematic but nowadays this can now be easily done with the accessibility and handling of computerized material.

In spite of the flaws just commented, this book is certainly a good read for all specialists concerned with the investigation of English negation. For those who are new to the field, this volume summarises in a short space a vast number of sources dealing with negation. For those scholars who already form part of the so-called generation of "negative" grammarians or syntacticians, the combination of a synchronic and diachronic

perspective will serve to provide a wider overview of many issues directly connected with negative polarity. Moreover, there are personal contributions that open new paths in the study of negative polarity. As mentioned at the beginning, I believe there is still considerable room for research in this area, particularly if variationist and corpus-based approaches are adopted.

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